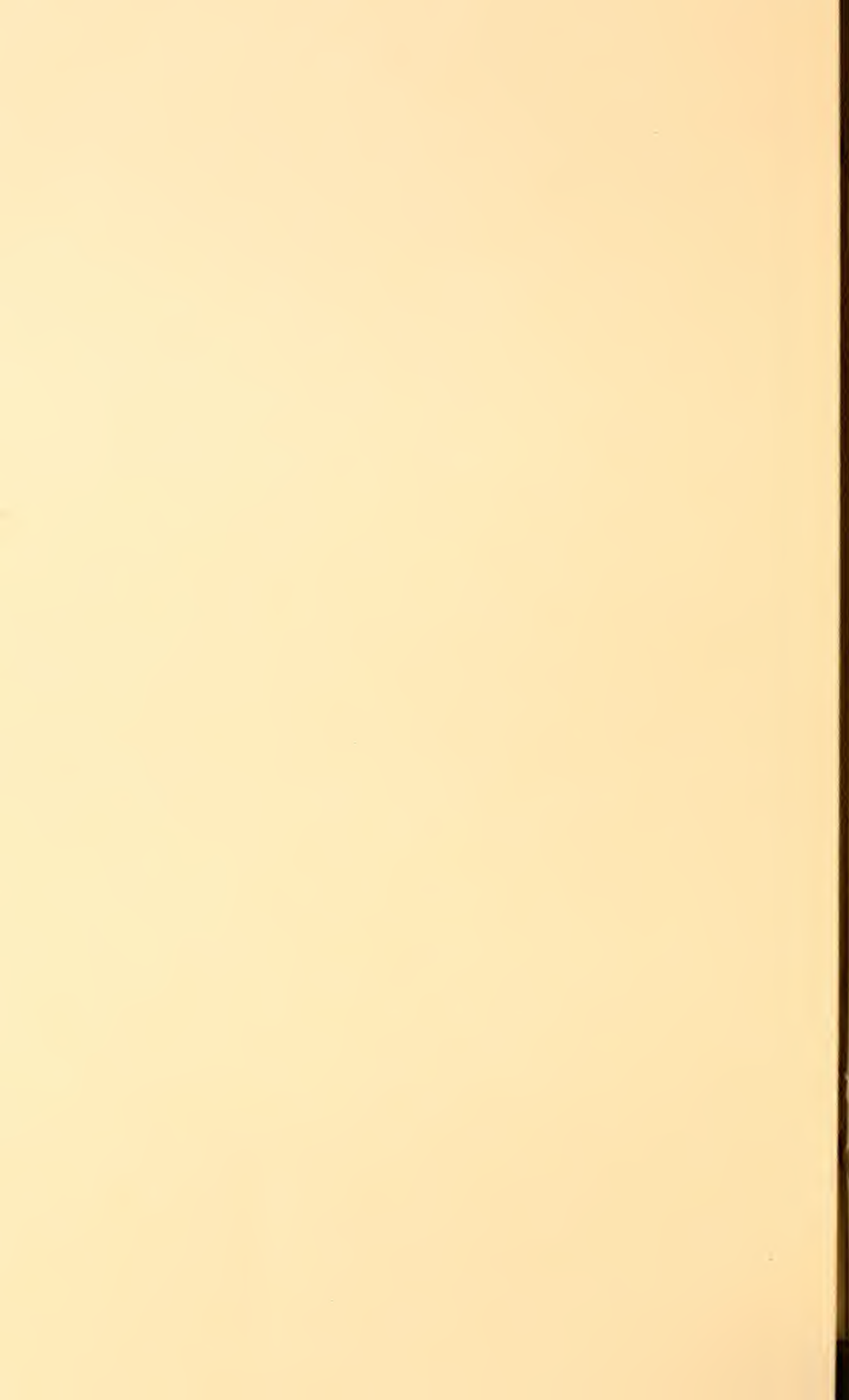


Historic, archived document

Do not assume content reflects current scientific knowledge, policies, or practices.



United States Department of Agriculture,

OFFICE OF THE SECRETARY—Circular 81.

HARVESTING, PICKING, THRASHING, AND STOR- ING PEANUTS.

By H. C. THOMPSON, *Horticulturist, Office of Horticultural and Pomological Investigations, Bureau of Plant Industry.*

The urgent need of conserving all food and feed crops this year (1917) makes it important that peanut growers and dealers use the very best methods possible in harvesting, picking, and handling the

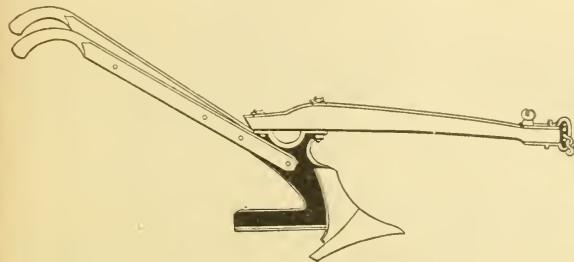


FIG. 1.—Plow type of peanut digger.

crop. The acreage in peanuts in 1917 is the largest ever planted in the United States. As a considerable portion of these peanuts are being grown in regions where the industry is compar-

atively new, a few suggestions in regard to the proper methods of handling the crop are deemed advisable.

The following directions for harvesting, picking, and handling peanuts have proved successful and are in use by the best and most progressive growers.

HARVESTING.

As no definite rule can be given by which to determine when peanuts are ready to dig, each grower must depend largely upon his own judgment. In the lower South, where frosts do not occur until quite late, the vines assume a yellowish color when the peanuts are mature. Peanuts should be dug when the vines have the greatest number of mature pods. Beginners in peanut growing should be careful not to dig too soon, as immature nuts shrivel and are light in weight when cured. A few early-formed peas are likely to sprout before digging time, especially if there is a period of rainy weather about the time the peanuts are maturing, but usually the loss by sprouting is not sufficient to justify premature harvesting.

Peanuts ordinarily are plowed from the ground with a turnplow which has the moldboard removed, as shown in figure 1, to prevent throwing dirt over the vines. This plow should be regulated by means

of a wheel attached to the beam so that the peanut roots can be cut off at any desired depth. The machine potato digger, shown in figure 2, does very satisfactory work and will dig 8 to 10 acres a day. This machine removes the peanuts from the ground and also shakes off the soil, leaving the vines lying upon the surface. As the machine digger is rather expensive its use is practicable only where a considerable acreage of peanuts is to be dug. The digging point of the machine can be set to cut off the root at any depth desired.

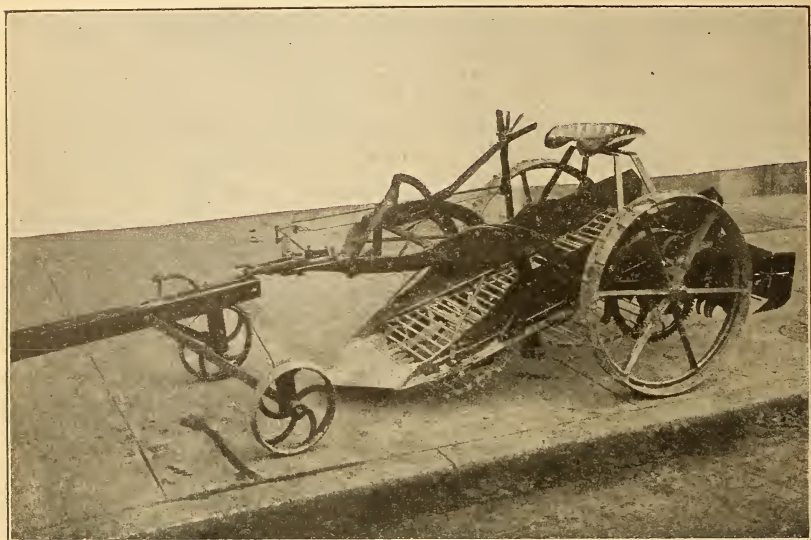


FIG. 2.—Machine potato digger adapted for harvesting peanuts.

After the peanuts are dug, a gang of workmen shake the vines free from the soil and throw them in small bunches. Where the machine digger is used, this shaking is unnecessary, as the machine frees the peanuts from the soil. The vines are left spread on the ground or in small bunches for three or four hours and are then placed in small stacks around a pole to cure. If peanuts are allowed to lie exposed for a considerable time after digging, the pods become discolored and lose in weight and the leaves drop off in handling.

The poles for the peanut stacks should be 3 or 4 inches in diameter and 7 to 8 feet long. These poles or stakes are set into the ground 12 to 18 inches and are well tamped to make them firm. In setting the poles a crowbar or a pointed bar of iron is necessary to make the hole.

Before starting the stack two pieces of lath, scrap lumber, or sapling cut from the woods, about 18 inches in length, are nailed at right angles to the stake 8 inches from the ground, as shown in figure 3, in order to prevent the peanuts coming in direct contact with the

soil. In starting to build the stack a few vines are laid across these pieces and the stack is then built up by successive layers of vines, the pods being kept well to the center against the stake and the tops to the outside. The stems should have sufficient outward slope to shed water. (See fig. 4.) Occasionally a few vines should be hung around the stake in order to tie the stack together. By this method the pods will be near the center and around the stake, where there is an upward circulation of air and general protection. When the



FIG. 3.—Stakes around which stacks of peanut vines are to be built.

stack has reached the desired height, a bunch of vines is rolled together and pressed down over the point of the stake to form a top, or a little dry grass or a few weeds may be used for this purpose.

It is not advisable to use anything for topping out the small stacks that will prevent the circulation of air. A heavy cover or a covering of green or wet hay will invariably cause the peanuts to spoil.

Curing in barns is not advisable either when curing peanuts for market or where the entire plant is fed to stock, as the crop will cure better in small stacks than when stored in bulk. After the nuts have been cured in the stack from four to six weeks, those intended for feeding purposes may be stored in barns or sheds.

Where stakes are difficult to secure and labor is scarce peanut growers sometimes rake the peanuts into windrows with a hayrake and stack them like hay. In doing this they should cure a little

longer before stacking than when they are to be put in small stacks around stakes. If the weather is dry during the curing and stacking and hogs can be turned into the field to save the peanuts left, there is very little loss by this method. Should the peanuts become wet while in the windrow they are seriously damaged for commercial purposes, but the damage is not so great if they are to be fed to



FIG. 4.—A laborer building a stack of peanut vines, showing the method used. Completed stacks are shown in the background.

stock. This plan should be followed only when it is not practicable to stack them around stakes as described.

PICKING AND THRASHING PEANUTS.

Peanuts should cure in the stack at least three or four weeks before picking or thrashing, in order to allow the pods to become dry and the peas firm.

Peanuts are still picked by hand in some sections, especially when the grower has only a few acres. Hand picking is a very laborious and dusty task. The expense of picking by hand is greater than by machinery, and as it is difficult to get enough labor for handwork machines are used by practically all large growers.

Two types of machines are used for picking peanuts from the vines. The common grain thrasher with a special cylinder for peanuts gives quite satisfactory results in removing Spanish peanuts from the vine.

The principal objection to cylinder machines is the tendency to break the pods, but by running the cylinder about 400 revolutions per minute and by feeding properly the breakage can be reduced to a very small percentage. If the peanuts are to be shelled soon after they go on the market, the breaking of the pods is not very objectionable. When oats or wheat are grown in localities where peanuts are raised, a cylinder machine can be used for all of these crops by having two cylinders, one for grain and one for peanuts.

The peanut picker works upon an entirely different principle from the cylinder machines. The picking is done by dragging the vines over a horizontal frame covered with wire mesh. The nuts drop through the wire and at the same time rubber brushes attached to an endless chain act on the lower side of the screen to remove the nuts. In addition to removing the pods from the vines, these machines have cleaning and stemming devices which remove the dirt and the small stems from the pods. The picker type of machine does not break or injure the pods, and for this reason it is especially desirable for picking peanuts that are to be sold in the pod or stored through the summer months.

After the peanuts are picked they should be stored in a dry place, preferably in a mouse-proof building. If the peanuts are damp after their removal from the vines they should be spread on a floor or stored in a well-ventilated building. When the pods are dry they may be put into bags as they come from the machine.

STORING PEANUTS ON THE FARM.

The farmer's safeguard in the matter of prices obtained for peanuts lies largely in his ability to hold at least a portion of his crop through the winter. Farmers should be prepared to hold their crop for a time rather than place it upon the market during the autumn, when the prices are generally lowest. In order to do this, suitable storage facilities are necessary.

Frequently the bags of peanuts are simply piled in an open shed or in a barn, where they are not properly protected. Occasionally the bags are stacked upon the ground in the field without even the protection of a canvas cover. Neither of the methods mentioned should be followed, because the peanuts would be injured by moisture and subject to the ravages of rats, mice, and other rodents. A building suitable for storing peanuts need not be expensive, but should protect them against injury by moisture and rodents and provide sufficient ventilation. A building constructed of rough lumber, with an iron roof, is satisfactory for storing peanuts, provided it is built up from the ground and all openings for ventilation are screened to keep out mice and rats.

In most cases peanuts are stored in bags, because this is the most convenient method. The bags should not be piled more than seven courses high and alleyways should be left every third or fourth row. Some growers follow the practice of storing in cribs or bins, where the peanuts are piled loose until they are wanted for market, at which time they are bagged. The method of storage on the farm matters little, provided the conditions are suitable. The less peanuts are handled the better, on account of breakage.

STORING PEANUTS IN LARGE WAREHOUSES.

In many sections of the South peanut growers can secure storage space in large commercial warehouses. It would be much better to store the crop in such houses than to put them in makeshift structures where they would be subject to injury by moisture and mice and rats. Where no satisfactory storage facilities are available it is best to market the crop as soon as it is ready, in order to prevent serious loss.

It has been the custom for a few cleaners and warehousemen to buy up peanuts during the autumn and to store them in large warehouses. Many of these warehouses are cheap frame structures, but during recent years some excellent storage houses have been built for this purpose. If a grower does not wish to sell his peanuts as soon as they are ready he can often have them stored in warehouses at the market center until he desires to sell them. The storage charges are not very high, and the difference between the price paid at thrashing or picking time and that paid a few months later usually will pay them several times.

OTHER PUBLICATIONS OF THE UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF AGRICULTURE OF INTEREST IN CONNECTION WITH THIS CIRCULAR.

AVAILABLE FOR FREE DISTRIBUTION BY THE DEPARTMENT.

The Peanut. (Farmers' Bulletin No. 431.)

Forage Crop in the Cotton Region. (Farmers' Bulletin No. 509.)

Peanut Oil. (Farmers' Bulletin No. 751.)

Peanut Butter. (Bureau of Plant Industry Circular No. 98.)

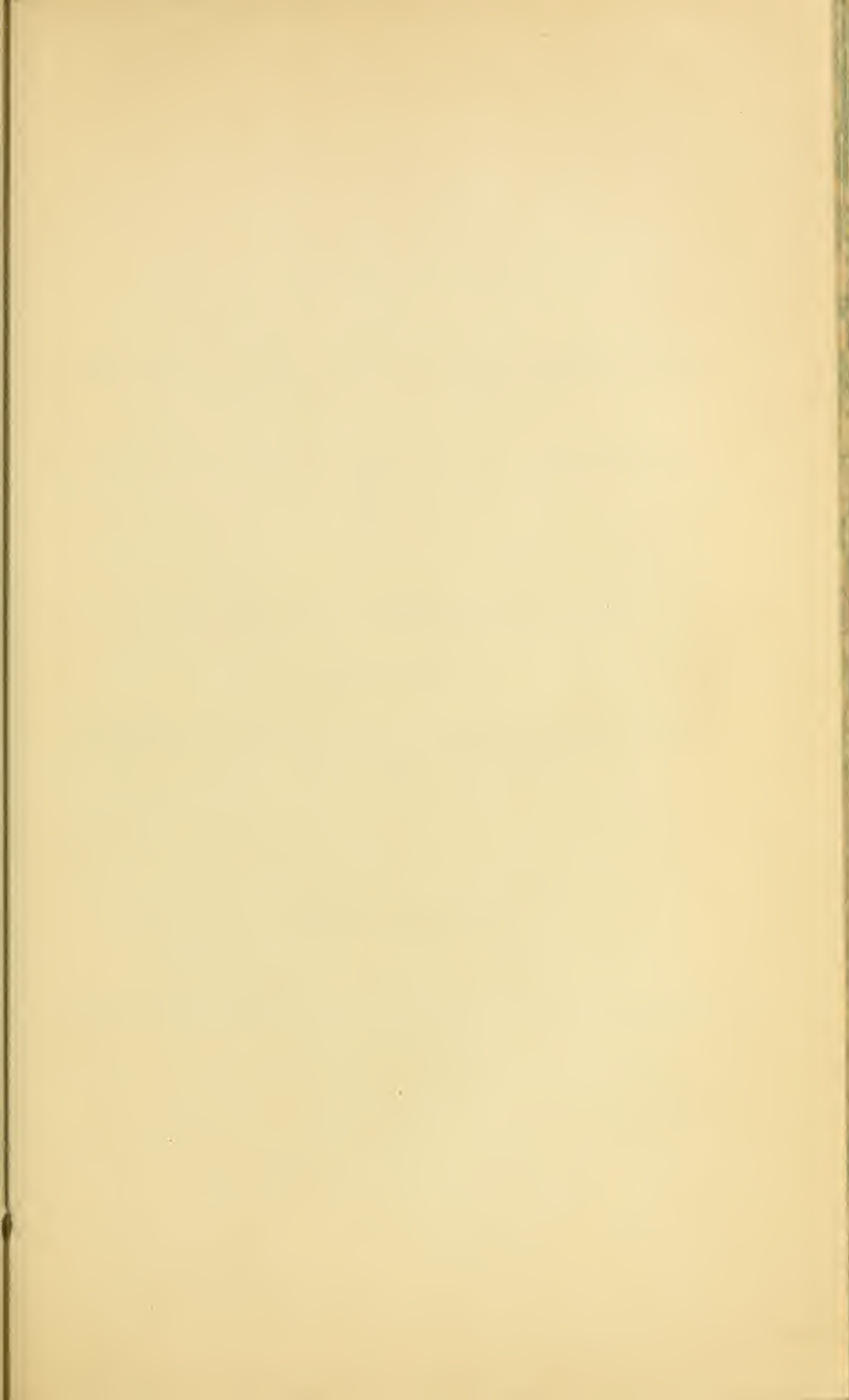
FOR SALE BY THE SUPERINTENDENT OF DOCUMENTS, GOVERNMENT PRINTING OFFICE, WASHINGTON, D. C.

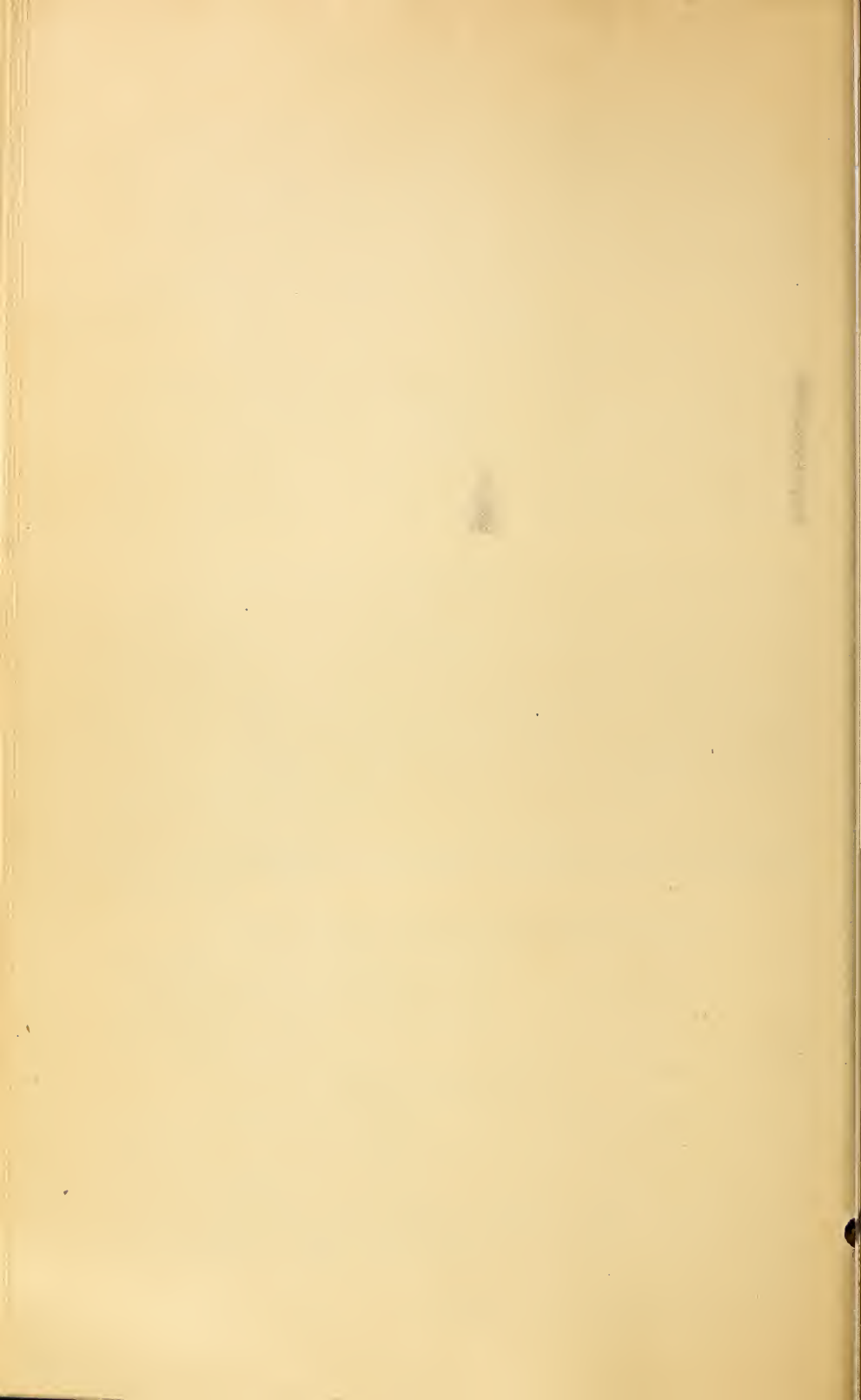
Beans, Peas, and Other Legumes as Food. (Farmers' Bulletin No. 121.) Price, 5 cents.

Forage Crops for Hogs in Kansas and Oklahoma. (Farmers' Bulletin No. 331.) Price, 5 cents.

Nuts and Their Use as Food. (Farmers' Bulletin No. 332.) Price, 5 cents.

Forage-Crop Experiments at San Antonio Field Station. (Bureau of Plant Industry Circular No. 106.) Price, 5 cents.





United States Department of Agriculture,
OFFICE OF THE SECRETARY—Circular No. 82.

RULES AND REGULATIONS
OF THE SECRETARY OF AGRICULTURE
UNDER THE
FOOD PRODUCTS INSPECTION LAW
OF AUGUST 10, 1917.

ISSUED OCTOBER 31, 1917.

